



**Homeland
Security**

Fact Sheet

October 22, 2004

Machine-Readable Passport Requirement

Effective October 26, 2004, travelers applying for admission under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) pursuant to section 217 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) must be in possession of a machine-readable passport (MRP). As an alternative, travelers may obtain a non-immigrant visa in their current (non-machine-readable) passport.

If, after October 26, 2004, a Visa Waiver Program national presents him or herself for admission to the United States without a machine-readable passport or non-immigrant visa, a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer is permitted to grant a one-time exemption to admit the traveler to the United States. The traveler will be issued a letter explaining the U.S. entry requirements and his or her passport will be annotated that a one-time exemption has been granted. If a traveler fails to obtain a machine-readable passport or a nonimmigrant visa for subsequent visits, she or he may be refused entry under the VWP.

Travelers who receive an exemption and make an incidental trip to Canada, Mexico or the adjacent islands as part of their trip to the United States, should be advised that the exemption is applied for one entry in the U.S. only. Once they leave the United States, they may not be allowed to reenter without an MRP, despite the exemption on their I-94.

A number of factors may impact compliance with this requirement and will be considered regarding one-time exemptions:

- Although outreach efforts have been made to advise travelers of this requirement, not all visa waiver travelers may be aware or may be confused by the various provisions.
- Each VWP applicant must now present an individual passport. Some family groups that list minor children on one of the parent's passports may be adversely affected. Families are encouraged to obtain individual machine-readable passports prior to travel.
- Some countries do not issue official or diplomatic MRPs. Diplomats or Government Officials who are on travel for government business will have a nonimmigrant visa with an "A-1 or A-2" classification and do not qualify for admission under the VWP.
- Travelers who apply for entry into the U.S. at an airport with a non-machine-readable passport for the purpose of departing on a cruise that makes multiple stops at various U.S. ports may be considered again for a one-time exemption at each successive location during their trip if they can establish continuous travel from the arrival through the period of the cruise and ultimate departure.

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For a period of six (6) months beginning October 26, 2004 until April 25, 2005, CBP will not impose a fine on the transportation carriers (under Section 273(a)(1) INA) for bringing to the United States any traveler who is a national of any one of twenty-two (22) designated countries applying for admission under the VWP without an MRP. The 22 countries are: Austria, Australia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

As of October 1, 2003, nationals of the following four countries were required to present an MRP for admission under the VWP: Andorra, Brunei, Liechtenstein, and Slovenia. Effective on that date, transportation carriers were liable for transporting nationals of these countries to the United States for admission under the VWP without an MRP. This new procedure will not affect that policy, and CBP will continue to impose a fine in those circumstances.

As of May 16, 2003, nationals of Belgium were required to present an MRP for admission under the VWP. Effective on that date, transportation carriers were liable for transporting these persons to the United States for admission under the VWP without an MRP. This new procedure will not affect that policy and CBP will continue to impose a fine in these circumstances.

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